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NUCLEAR STRIDES ASCRIBED TO CHINA

Missile Attack Possible by
1970's Congress Is Told

By JOHN W. FINNEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2 — The Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy reported today that Communist China was making "rapid progress" in developing thermonuclear warheads and predicted that it would be capable of launching a missile attack on the United States by the early nineteen-seventies.

China's progress, the committee said, "has been more rapid and surprisingly more effective than had been expected or indeed predicted."

The report said China seemed to be placing high priority on producing thermonuclear weapons and might be forgoing production of smaller fission weapons to conserve materials for hydrogen-bomb warheads.

China, according to the committee, already has the capability of designing a multimegaton thermonuclear bomb for delivery by an airplane and, by about 1970, should be able to develop a warhead in the megaton, or million-ton, class for an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Based on Testimony

The committee's five-page report, "The Impact of Chinese Communist Nuclear Weapons Progress on United States National Security," is the most definitive official appraisal of China's nuclear weapons program to be made public. It is based on secret testimony earlier this year from representatives of the State and Defense Departments, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Atomic Energy Commission and atomic weapons laboratories.

The report differed from the Johnson Administration's public assessment of how soon China would be able to attack the United States with ballistic missiles armed with thermonuclear warheads.

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara has estimated that China would not deploy "a significant number" of intercontinental ballistic missiles before the mid nineteen-seventies and that the missiles then would not have great reliability, speed or accuracy for protection against attack.

The differences may be more semantic than real. By "significant" Mr. McNamara is referring to the committee's point is that even a few missiles, each armed with a thermonuclear warhead capable of wiping out a city, could be significant in terms of military threat.

Time for Decision

Mr. McNamara has argued that the United States has time before a decision must be made on deployment of an antiballistic missile system. The committee report implies that the United States has less time than presumed by the Administration.

The stated purpose of the report was to describe the technical aspects of China's nuclear weapons progress and not to go into the implications for the future.

The committee members hoped, however, that the report would provide a basis for discussion by Congress of China's emergence as a nuclear power.

The committee said that the Chinese were "well ahead of the French in thermonuclear weapon design" and had succeeded, in two and a half years and six experiments, in testing a multimegaton thermonuclear device, while the French, after many more tests over a seven years, had yet to test a thermonuclear device.

The Chinese, the report said, took a "major step toward a thermonuclear weapon" with their fifth test, in December, 1966, in which thermonuclear materials were included.

Results of Sixth Test

With their sixth test, last June, the report continued, the Chinese achieved "a considerable improvement" in increasing explosive yield and decreasing weight.

Although China is capable of developing a thermonuclear bomb for an airplane, the report said that the Chinese bomber force consisted of a few hundred short-range jets and a handful of longer-range bombers. It said there was no indication that China planned to develop heavy intercontinental bombers.

Rather, the report said, the Chinese seem to be emphasizing missiles as the delivery systems for their thermonuclear warheads. There is evidence, it said, that China has already completed development of a missile with a range of around 800 miles, but there is no indication that it has been deployed.

The committee said that China appeared to be interested in developing submarines equipped with relatively long-range missiles, but "at this time we have not determined the exact nature or status of a program."

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